

Remarks for the White House Listening Session
Hyatt Regency Hotel, December 8, 2004

Thank you.

I am delighted to be here for a number of reasons.

First, the notion of a listening session is exciting to me.

It represents a value that I have endorsed all of my life:

the evolution of service

that is responsive to the needs of the people.

And second, the listening session is in perfect tune with the mission of our department. For that reason, The Department on Aging takes its responsibility as host of this event most seriously.

Our department is, as most of you know, mandated to serve the elders in our state with information, education and service.

But we cannot do that – or at least, we **SHOULD** not do that -- until we have listened

to the concerns and needs of the people whom we serve.

Service doesn't just develop because **WE** think it is a good idea.

No. the programs and services to which

we have devoted our careers are developed in response to research.

Surveys of the families we serve. Interviews with the elders.

Studies of best practices. Assessments of effectiveness, quality, validity and reliability.

And, finally, we take into account
the most important, single criterion that we identify as basic to
good service:

We listen.

For the past two years, our Department has listened to you.

Intently. With patience. With empathy and understanding.

We have listened to the concerns of rural elders.

We have listened to the many groups of minorities populations in
our state.

We have listened to cityfolk, suburbanites
and residents of small towns.

We have listened to the healthy, vital people entering retirement
and to their frail, vulnerable parents and grandparents.

As we listen, we learn.

And from that learning, from that understanding,
programs develop.

It doesn't happen overnight. But it happens.

And the programs that develop represent the will
and the needs of the people.

That is how it should be in our rich, diverse democracy.

And that is how it will continue to be,
as long as we use the tools of democracy available to us.

Tools like this listening session.

This session is a powerful tool. It offers a voice to everyone, every person in this state who has an opinion about the issues that affect older people in our country.

The issues you raise here today, the opinions you express, will be considered as the agenda is made ready for the White House Conference next year.

Thank you for coming and sharing your insights, your wisdom and your experience.

And thank you, too, for taking the time to share your opinions.

I know that there are many, competing demands on your time.

So we are grateful that you have chosen to concentrate on this task.

Your opinions do count.

And they will affect the lives of the generations of older people who follow us.

What you think is important.

And, I assure you, **we ARE listening.**